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IN DEFENCE OF THE QUEBEC MINORITY.*

Huntingdon, Q., 26 Feby., 1894.

TO HON. H. G. JOLY:

SIR,—On the evening of the 19th you addressed an audience in Toronto with the object of disabusing the minds of the people of Ontario of the impression that the minority in Quebec have cause for dissatisfaction. You admitted that the minority are dissatisfied, but you contended they have no right to be dissatisfied, though you acknowledged, in speaking as you did, you were running counter to the convictions of your most intimate friends among them. Thus, at the outset, you put yourself in the position of bearing witness against the Quebec minority and the burden of your address is, that they are fairly and justly treated by the majority, and, so far as lay in your power, you represented them to the people of Ontario and of the Dominion as grumblers without cause, whose complaints are undeserving of consideration. Your address is, in reality an accusation of the English-speaking and Protestant minority of Quebec of

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being guilty of bad faith in pretending that they have any cause for complaint as to their treatment by the majority. You said you appeared in Ontario as a witness against them to prove that. Now, sir, the Quebec minority is not disposed to rest quietly under your accusation, and, if the evidence you as a witness produced fails to sustain your charge of being dissatisfied without cause you have been guilty of misrepresenting them and of unjustly holding them up to a representative Ontario audience of being pretenders and impostors.

You divide your evidence as a witness against the Quebec minority under three heads—1 political influence, 2 education, 3 security of property. What you said under the first head may be dismissed, for you testify against yourself by admitting "that the English Protestant minority does not get its full share of offices." That admission you endeavor to temper by contending that the treasurer of the province has been generally a Protestant. Considering that of the revenue the treasurer handles he collects two-thirds from the minority, that is a marvellous condescension on the part of the majority. It was a grave omission, that you did not tell your hearers that when you were premier you twice ignored the arrangement you now praise.

Under the head of education you treated of La Minerve's idea of toleration, of the P.P.A., of tithes and fabrique taxes. What the Quebec min-

ority has to do with either the Minerve or the P. P.A. nobody can understand, for the views and methods of both are alike repugnant to them. Your defence of church dues is a begging of the question—namely, that it is a good way to raise money for the support of religion and which Protestants might well copy. You must know the opposition of the minority to the system of church dues is not on the grounds you put it. To impose a tax on land to build church and parsonage and another tax on grain to assist in paying the priest's salary may be, as you allege, the fairest way imaginable. On that the minority express no opinion. Their objection is not to these dues in themselves, but to the power of the State being placed at the service of the priests to collect those dues. In a self-governing country for the laws enacted and their execution the people are accountable, and surely it is an outrage on the consciences of Protestants to make them parties to laws against which their sense of right revolts? They urge no objection to the habitant voluntarily paying tithe and tax, but they emphatically object to the government enacting laws to compel the habitant to pay. By the enactment and maintenance of such laws by the legislature, the minority are made parties to them, and, therefore, have an unquestioned right to express their opinion about them and agitate for their repeal. That the habitant should pay the demands of his church under the

threat of a writ issuing against him in Queen Victoria's name, is a monstrous abuse of the power of the State which loyal men will continue to protest against while breath is spared them.

You told the Ontario people that "the right of separate education" is accorded to the Quebec minority and therefore they have no cause to complain. The school-system of Quebec is distinctly Catholic, sectarian to a degree which none of the separate schools of the other provinces approach—schools the very essence and aim of whose teaching is to make the scholars Catholics. Yet because Protestants are not compelled to send their children to schools where they would be imbued with the doctrine and trained to take part in the service of the church of the majority, you, Mr Joly, hold they have naught to be dissatisfied with! Is not the system of education in Quebec a public system, is it not maintained by public money collected from all its inhabitants irrespective of creed, and that being so, why should the money of the State be taken to teach the doctrines of any church? It is the duty of all governments to provide secular education: it is the right of none to teach theology. Do you not see that the school system of Quebec is a glaring injustice and a violation of all British constitutional principles? Yet this system you accept as a matter of course, and tell an Ontario audience the Quebec minority have no cause for dissatisfaction because they are

permitted to have separate schools. This is in keeping with your statement that the minority "are allowed to enjoy their property in Quebec" in security. You speak as if Quebec was a foreign country and Protestants interlopers who ought to be thankful for the smallest favors. Sir, the province of Quebec is not an Austria or a Spain. It is a British possession and its English-speaking inhabitants have no need to beg as favors from the majority what is theirs by birthright. They demand their privileges as British subjects as matter of right and are under obligation to no man for them. When you speak as if they ought to be thankful the majority does not compel them to send their children to schools where the doctrines and the ritual of the church of Rome are made paramount, when you speak of their having cause for gratitude in being allowed to hold the property they have earned, when you boast that the majority do not interfere with the religion of the Protestants of Quebec, you reveal how much you have to learn of the British constitution and of the dignity and scope of the rights that pertain to every British subject. The Quebec minority is composed neither of cravens nor imbeciles. They know what is their due as Britons, and, please God, they will not lower the standard of the measure of their rights or bend their backs to the despotism from which their fathers delivered them. They are in no way beholden to the majority for

the privileges you enumerate, and they point, as a violation of their rights as British subjects, to the placing at the disposal of the hierarchy of the machinery of our courts to collect the taxes they levy, to the subsidizing at the general expense of their conventual institutions, to the enacting of laws giving them special powers over their members, and to taking from the public purse money to maintain a system of sectarian schools. How do you reconcile your assertions about the liberality, the justice, the entirely satisfactory nature of the treatment of the minority in educational matters, with the facts, which you must know, of the assessments of Protestant shareholders in commercial corporations and of Protestant farmers where too few to maintain a school of their own, going to the support of Catholic institutions?

You laid down as the object of your address the establishing of the assertion that the Quebec minority have no right to be dissatisfied with their position, and all you brought forward in the way of proof was that the minority are allowed to hold property, that with five or six exceptions the position of provincial treasurer has been allotted to an English-speaking member, that the religion of the minority is not interfered with, that they are even permitted to build churches, that they are expressly exempted by statute from paying assessments to the priests, that they are not forced to send their children to Catholic schools, that the

degree of B.A. from a Protestant college qualifies for admission to the study of law and medicine and, lastly, that Catholics elected you to be a member of the legislature, and supported you as premier. Analyze your address as reported in the Globe and you will find that is the sum and substance of all you advanced to show "rationally and logically the minority have no right to complain." This very list is the measure of condemnation of the conduct of the majority, for were the majority not disposed, if they could, to be intolerant and despotic would they claim it as a merit that Protestants are allowed by them in the province of Quebec freedom of their religion, to hold property, and are not compelled to send their children to be trained as Catholics? In the sixteenth century such an enumeration of benefits might have excited admiration; to claim merit for the barest toleration excites only scornful derision at the threshold of the nineteenth. The deeds of governments and of peoples are not now-a-days measured by medieval standards, and to advance, as you did in your address, that the Quebec majority are entitled to the confidence and esteem of the people of Ontario because they do not "persecute the minority" is benighted praise. You stood before an audience that included the premier of Ontario to prove that the Quebec minority are without cause for the dissatisfaction that prevails among them, and all you adduced to establish your affirmation, was the

negative evidence that the majority does not persecute them—does not treat them as it has the Oka Indians.

He who brings a scandalous charge against his neighbor and fails either to substantiate or retract it is guilty of libel. You have held up the minority of Quebec to the scorn of the Dominion as a people dissatisfied without rhyme or reason, and have failed to prove your charge. You know full well that the petty causes you went over have little weight in creating the dissatisfaction you acknowledge, and as I do not think it fair the minority be left in the ridiculous light you held them up in, of complaining without cause, of asserting they have grievances when they have none, let me supply the facts of which you left your hearers in ignorance.

The Quebec minority are dissatisfied because the government of the province has ceased to be conducted on constitutional lines. A plain right of every British subject is, that he shall not be discriminated against because of his religious belief. To confer exceptional privileges on one church, is equivalent to placing other churches under disabilities. When the two political parties which compose the majority have come to an understanding, that the State shall waive its jurisdiction over educational and charitable institutions and hand them over to the absolute control of the hierarchy and supply the money required, surely

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the minority are justified in declaring that such a system is contrary to British precedent and law. Take last session as proof. When a trumpety bill was introduced, providing for meetings of school boards being open, was not the question gravely put, has the consent of the bishops been obtained for this measure? A British legislature declaring itself incompetent to consider any bill affecting education which has not been first submitted to and initialled by the bishops! When the purchase of Beauport asylum was being considered, did not a minister of the crown produce a letter from the cardinal's coadjutor as his authority for completing the bargain? It is undeniable that wherever the interests of the church extend—and what layman can fix the limit?—our provincial government is its humble servant, the ratifier of its decrees; that we have all the drawbacks of a State church with none of its advantages, for while the government is the purveyor of the wants and protector of the interests of the church, no concordat specifies the power or defines the jurisdiction the State shall have in the affairs of the church. It is this blending of the ecclesiastical with the temporal, this overshadowing of the State by the church, that constitutes the dry rot in Quebec and is causing the Protestant population to fade from every part of it outside the island of Montreal. In speaking of the Jesuit estates' bill you alleged that the cry against it was one of

misapprehension arising from religious prejudice. Sir, you know that for the Quebec minority the naming of the Pope in the preamble created neither apprehension nor indignation. What the minority objected to in that bill was the very thing I here dwell upon, namely, that before introducing the bill the government, as is recited in the preamble, asked and obtained the permission of the Pope, and that the body of the bill provided that the distribution of the \$400,000 of public money it voted should be left to the Pope. No man zealous for constitutional government will recognize the right of any foreign court to dictate what measures shall be submitted to a British legislature or leave to a foreign court the allocation of its public monies. The undertone of your address is the implication that the dissatisfaction that prevails among the Quebec minority is due to religious prejudice. It is one of the disadvantages under which the Protestant labors in contending against the ecclesiastico-political system that dominates Quebec, that his motive is ascribed to his theological opinions. That zeal for constitutional rule, an ardent desire for a government uncontrolled and unaffected by any church, should be our motive, you seem to be no more willing to concede than the most bigoted Castor.

Lastly, the minority are dissatisfied because they see a movement among the majority to establish Quebec as an autonomous and independent pro-

vince. For nine years they have watched an organized effort to that end and only last summer they saw the gentleman who acted as your solicitor general make a tour in the United States in furtherance of the scheme, to sever the link that binds the province of Quebec to the British crown. The clearest proof of the growth of this idea of independence, of the wide and deeply rooted character of their cherished hope that the day is approaching when Quebec shall cease to be a British dependency, we find in two men like yourself and Mr Laurier deeming it politic not to repudiate the leader who is plotting to bring it about.

You have placed the Quebec minority in the contemptible position of complaining without cause, of being dissatisfied without right, and your doing so has been termed a message of peace, on the principle, I presume, that it endeavors to justify the majority and condemns the minority. It is not the first time the weak have had to shoulder the blame that pertains to the strong; the sufferer to bear the odium that should follow his oppressor. You are chivalrous, you are candid, you are open to conviction. On reconsidering the subject, will you not undo the wrong you have done the Quebec minority by telling the people of the Dominion that you spoke at Toronto under misapprehension, that the English-speaking people of Quebec have good reason to be dissatisfied because the government of their province is largely

unconstitutional and because they are opposed to the movement fostered among the majority to sever British connection? If loyal upholding of the British crown and constitution be a crime in this province of Quebec, then are the minority guilty. But you do not think so, you are a loyal and a just man, and being so I appeal to you to undo the wrong you have done that minority to which I belong.

Yours respectfully,

ROBT. SELLAR.



